

WHO foresees 1 billion smoking deaths

by UPI

BANGKOK - World health experts predicted in Thailand Monday 1 billion people will die of tobacco-related illnesses this century unless governments act to curb smoking.

"Tobacco is a defective product. It kills half of its customers," said Douglas Bettcher, head of the World Health Organization's Tobacco Free Initiative. "It kills 5.4 million people per year and half of those deaths are in developing countries. That's like one jumbo jet going down every hour."

With smoking rates increasing in many developing countries, the annual death toll would rise to 8.3 million within the next 20 years, Bettcher said at the start of an international conference in Bangkok.

However, he said if governments raise taxes, ban advertising and made more public areas tobacco-free, smoking rates could be cut in half by 2050, the Pakistan Daily Times reported.

"It's a completely preventable epidemic," Bettcher said. "If we do that, by 2050 we can save 200 million lives."

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